

DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: REIMAGINING THE NEXUS

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Abstract

This study contends that democracy is at the crossroads in Nigeria. Furthermore, the paper posits that national development has altogether, only truly manifested in the inscrutable imaginations of Nigeria's national development planners. The general objective of the study was to examine the relationship between democracy and sustainable national development in Nigeria and consequently reimagine the nexus. The specific objectives were to: (i) examine the extent to which there is politics without progress in Nigeria (ii) verify the extent to which there is democracy without development in Nigeria and (iii) recommend ways of making Nigeria's democracy, invariably lead to sustainable national development. The theoretical framework for the study is the political economy framework. The research methodology is the critical mode of research. We argue in the study that the underpinnings of Nigeria's brand of democracy, fully shows the tendencies of democratic capitalism, otherwise known as capitalist democracy. Findings of the study highly support the thesis that there is politics without progress in Nigeria. Furthermore, our findings justify the viewpoint that critically, there is democracy without development in Nigeria. Democracy, it is imagined in the study, must lead to the creation of new Nigerians and the core of the brand of democracy that would link democracy with development in Nigeria, has to be essentially deliberative.

Keywords: Democracy, development, Nigeria, reimagination

Introduction

Democracy is at the crossroads in Nigeria. National Development also has altogether, only materialized in the inscrutable imaginations of Nigeria's national development planners. Indeed, a plethora of studies exist on democracy and development in Nigeria [Achebe (1983), Joseph (1987),

Oyovbaire (1987), Osaghae (1998), Ibabor (2004), Ofuebe, (2005), Joseph and Gillies (2010), Campbell (2011), Ogundiya, et al, 2011, Akwen and Geveer (2012), Kuka (2012), Majekodunmi (2012), Lawal and Olukayode (2012), Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013), Omodia (2013)]. There is therefore, ostensibly in existence, a humongous volume of panacea on the possibilities of establishing an empirical nexus between democracy and sustainable national development in Nigeria. Furthermore, the most contemporary critical policy ambitions and interventions in the area of democracy and sustainable national development in Nigeria, are inter alia: the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), promoted by the Olusegun Obasanjo Administration (1999-2007); the Seven-point Agenda of the Umaru Yar'Adua Dispensation (2007-2010) and the Transformation Agenda of the current Goodluck Jonathan era, which commenced 2010. In effect, what the above-mentioned development try-outs seriously have in common, is the assumption that democracy and national development are products of policy sentiments. The endpoints of these assumptions have been pedagogic imaginations that are cast in stone, on how some immutable precepts of classical democracy and some modern versions of democratic shenanigans, invariably lead to sustainable national development. In this regard, Ja'afaruBambale (2011:22) opines that in reality the NEEDS reforms have left much to be desired; Dode (2010:7) contends that the Yar'Adua Administration lacked the political and administrative will to implement the seven-point agenda; while Gyong (2012:106) sees as a major challenge to the success of the Transformation Agenda of President Jonathan, the near absence of a purposeful, trusted, respected and focused leadership in Nigeria.

Indeed, in December 2013, ex-President Obasanjo, generally known to have been responsible for Jonathan's ascendancy to Nigeria's presidency, in an 18-page publicly circulated letter, addressed to President Jonathan, accused the President as a person, of being deficit in purposeful, trustworthy, respectable and focused leadership credentials. Chief Obasanjo, in highly acerbic tones, accused President Jonathan of being bereft of democratic tendencies and credentials. Yet, as pointed out by Campbell (2013), there is irony in Obasanjo's critique, as he more than anyone else was responsible for Jonathan's selection as PDP vice presidential candidate in 2007 and with the death of President Yar'Adua in 2010, Jonathan became the president - and the incumbent in 2011, after emerging victorious in a general election. Truly, since Nigeria's return to the path of democratic governance in 1999, among the greatest tests to the resilience of the nation's new democracy, must be counted the attempt by the then President Obasanjo to extend his stay in office, beyond the constitutionally permitted two terms of four years each. Thus, reacting then to the defeat at the Nigerian National Assembly, of what

was nationally known as Obasanjo's Third Term Agenda, Sango (2006) opined that for the vast majority of the ordinary people across Nigeria, President Obasanjo was synonymous with socio-economic disaster. Curiously, this same Ex-President Obasanjo has returned to advise President Jonathan on democracy and development.

Furthermore on policy ambitions, we highlight that beyond the three policy encapsulations strictly identifiable above with the three democratic leadership epochs in Nigeria, there is yet the fourth of such grandstandings that its initiation or fine-tuning, could be partly claimed by any of the above-mentioned Nigerian regimes. The occasioning esoteric ambition goes by the au courant nomenclature of Vision 20, 2020. However, there is hardly anything in the contents of Vision 20, 2020 in Nigeria, that is new; that can not be found in extant Nigerian policy documents. In fact, in a burst of curious self-deprecation, Nigerian Vision 20:2020 (2009:7) claims to have encapsulated the key principles and thrusts of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the Seven Point Agenda of the democratic administration (2007-2011); positing to have situated both policies, within a single, long term strategic planning perspective that would take Nigeria to the year 2020. But the fact remains that in its entirety, the contents of Nigerian Vision 20:2020 are already embedded in extant Nigerian development literature; in long term, short term or strategic perspectives.

Let it also be highlighted that in the course of this study, academics in publicly owned universities in Nigeria were on strike for seven months running; and the institutions remained unopened. On this score, it is instructive to note that out of the 123 (one hundred and twenty three) universities in Nigeria, 73 (seventy three) are publicly owned - made up of 36 (thirty six) federal universities and 37 (thirty seven) state universities (United States Embassy in Nigeria, 2012). The puzzle then has to do with how the closure of the universities fits into Vision 20: 2020. Meanwhile, the Nigerian Vision 20:2020 (2009:19), as an aspect of the social dimension of its aspirations, talks about a modern and vibrant educational system that meets international standards of quality education; which is accessible and adequately aligned to the changing needs of the society and the demands of industry. Hence, democracy in Nigeria has only given birth to what Joseph and Gillies (2010:185) pinpoint as politics without progress and Kuka (2012:1) describes as the political class, treating Nigerian politics as national bazaar.

Truly, in Nigeria's current post-military dispensation, politics without progress or politics as national bazaar, invariably translate to democracy without progress. Parenthetically, democracy without progress is democracy without development. Progress must be person-centered and development,

human focused. Progress must not be conceived in terms of official figures that ostensibly indicate growth. Hence, what is to be done requires some reimaginings. Accordingly, the general objective of this study is to examine the relationship between democracy and sustainable national development in Nigeria and consequently reimagine their nexus. The specific objectives are to: (i) examine the extent to which there is politics without progress in Nigeria (ii) verify the extent to which there is democracy without development in Nigeria and (iii) recommend ways of making Nigeria's democracy, invariably lead to national development. The theoretical framework for the study is the political economy framework. The theory of political economy draws heavily on the subject of economics, political science, law, history and sociology or different closely related branches of economics to explain the politico-economic behavior of a country (Timimi 2010:1). Thus, it is strictly held in this study that economic development is central to national development. In other words, it is strictly held in the study that the effective interplay of politics and economics lead to national development. The study uses as research methodology, the critical mode of research; which fundamentally, conforms to the study's theoretical framework of political economy.

Conceptual Issues in Democracy

The democratic form of government has fascinated philosophers since the first democracies appeared in ancient Greece about 2500 years ago (Fleck and Hanssen, 2002:2). In the process, a number of scholars have concluded that although the term democracy, is derived from Greek *demokratia*, literally peoplepower, democracy today has nothing to do with power or the people, let alone the power of (all) the people and if it still retains any content whatever, it is merely that of "free elections" and other sorts of occasional voting, for what is becoming an ever-smaller proportion of the potential electorate (Cartledge, 2007:162; citing Dunn 1993; Wood 1995). Hence, in further situating democracy within the historical context of its ancient Greek origins, Ober (2007:94) argues that to say that an event made democracy possible requires us to define what we mean by democracy. Ober (2007:99) further argues: my preferred alternative is to look at the root meaning of the compound word *dēmokratia* and the ideals that are exemplified in philo-democratic writing (and parodied by democracy's critics) from the fifth through the fourth century. *Dēmokratia* means, *imprimis*, the power of the people: the publicly manifested power of the *dēmos* to make things happen. It is the authority or dominance of the *dēmos* in the polis (Ober, 2007:99). In continuation of his definition of democracy; Ober (2008), posits that the original meaning of democracy is the capacity to do things, not majority rule. This is instructive, within our context of

democracy and sustainable national development in Nigeria. This is because, there is this apparent Nigerian orthodoxy that equates democracy to majority rule. However, a basic assumption of democracy is that it should guarantee the welfare of the citizens. In Nigeria however, Ojabor and Allen (2009) have demonstrated that democracy neglects the welfare of the citizens. Hence, any system of government that fails to guarantee the welfare of the citizens will be difficult to market as democracy. It may be more germane to call such a system ceremonial democracy. It does appear however, as if the underpinnings of Nigeria's brand of democracy, fully shows the tendencies of democratic capitalism, otherwise known as capitalist democracy. We now turn to the concept of democratic capitalism.

Democratic Capitalism in Nigeria: The Current Position and The Future Reality

The problem of democracy and sustainable national development in Nigeria is fundamentally, a problem of democratic capitalism. Streeck (2011: 3) has characterized democratic capitalism as follows: a political economy ruled by two conflicting principles or regimes of resource allocation: one operating according to marginal productivity or what is revealed as *merit* by a free play of market forces and the other following social need or *entitlement*, as certified by the collective choices of democratic politics. Governments under democratic capitalism are under pressure to honor both principles simultaneously, although substantively the two almost never agree - or they can afford to neglect one in favor of the other only for a short time until they are punished by the consequences, political in the one case and economic in the other (Streeck, 2011:3). Younkins (1998:1) further highlights that according to Michael Novak, democratic capitalism is an amalgam of three systems: (1) an economy based predominantly on free markets and economic incentives, (2) a democratic polity and (3) a classical-liberal moral-cultural system which encourages pluralism. Essentially, capitalism is an economic system characterized by freedom of thought and voluntary action creatively applied to production; it is based on private property rights, economic justice, the profit motive, competition, a division of labor, and requisite social cooperation. Democracy is based on the principles of consent and political equality and may be defined as a political system in which governments are established by majority votes cast in regular, uncoerced elections. It is often argued that capitalism is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of democracy since democracy requires basic economic rights that are separate from the state (Younkins, 1998:2). Here lies the contradictions of democratic capitalism.

Indeed, the above explications read like elucidations on Nigeria's troubled political economy. Nigeria's political economy is managed by an

ostensibly inchoate and dubious politico-economic class, whose actual dilemma rather borders on the contradictions of democratic capitalism. Let us illustrate: when this class designs NEEDS and their various AGENDA and VISIONS; they know that the programmes are outlandish. But they need such bizarre designs in all their multiplier dimensions to gratify and recompense their capitalist partners, whose interests and tastes must be accommodated at all times. They also use such eccentric designs to give a semblance of democratic commitments to salivating but bemused citizens. Hence, after nearly a decade and half of NEEDS, a Seven-point agenda, a Transformation agenda and a Vision 20: 2020 master plan, a curious position has arisen whereby, ostensibly as part of the agricultural miracles of these fateful experimentations, Nigeria is now the No1 producer of cassava on the face of the earth (see Asante-Pok, 2013). However, in all the (local) Nigerian markets, the cost of garri, a food derivative of cassava and a major Nigerian staple, keeps recording unbearable increases (Orewa and Egware, 2012: vanguardngr.com, 2013), an indication that democracy or democratic capitalism has not guaranteed economic security. This is the current position. Let us turn to the future reality.

In essence, the future reality is contemplated with trepidation. Kuka (2012:1) alludes to the future reality as the type that might emanate from a present terminal condition. He goes further to posit that with the nation tottering dangerously on the precipice, with the increasing central role being played by non-state actors and institutions, with the political class treating politics as a national bazaar, it is clear that the matters of the survival of the nation are too serious to be left to the political class which behaves as if there is neither a teacher nor a class (Kuka, 2012:1). It is not highfalutin to suggest that the Nigerian nation is tottering dangerously on the precipice, in an era that Kuka (2013) characterizes as an era of Epistolatocracy (Government by Letter Writing). This is in an apparent reference to the harvest of letters witnessed by the political system in Nigeria, after ex-President Obasanjo wrote to President Jonathan in December 2013, accusing the President of being deficit in democratic tendencies and credentials and above all, questioning the President's moral credentials as a person. Former President Obasanjo's first daughter (Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello), was purportedly the next to write (to her father), probably provoked by her father's letter to President Jonathan; calling her father unprintable names and vowing that the letter was her last communication ever, with an irresponsible father, who had been behaving as if he was the owner of Nigeria. Very many other open political letters were consequently transmitted to the polity, until the climax or anti-climax (depending on the reader's political leaning) came in the form of President Jonathan's reply to former President Obasanjo.

In any case, we are more concerned in this study, with the import of President Jonathan's reply to ex-President Obasanjo, than with the contents; being that the contents of the three principal letters (the contentious Iyabo letter inclusive), were never fundamentally about the welfare of Nigerian citizens. According to Momodu (2013:1), none of the letters truthfully addressed the issues of development - the issues of economic security. They were letters reeking with personal animosity and rabid vendetta. The common motive was simple and easy to decipher: who controls power and Nigeria's commonwealth from 2015, after the general elections? No more, no less (Momodu, 2013:1). Furthermore, Igbokwe (2013), feels as follows: open stealing of the common patrimony, lack of accountability, impunity, intimidation of opposition, weak leadership, insecurity; nepotism and gross abuse of office have been the hallmark of President Jonathan's administration. Ex-President Obasanjo's letter to President Jonathan should be seen as a service to father land even though the messenger is defective, and his hands ugly. If Jonathan and his handlers are not managed or called to order, they can rock the boat (Igbokwe, 2013). In essence, the foregoing advances our thesis of a precarious picture of future reality.

In tandem, Lijadu (2013) raises the following issues, with regards to President Jonathan's reply to ex-President Obasanjo's letter: First, Mr. President said he was obligated to write Mr. Obasanjo because he doesn't want to be seen as ignoring a former President. One wonders if this President is so fearful that he had to account for his stewardship to a former President rather than Nigerians. I thought that the office of the President is above all others in the country, except the people who elected him (Lijadu, 2013). By not holding a Press conference, to respond to Mr. Obasanjo's accusations, the notice that the President gave to all Nigerians is that he is accountable to Mr. Obasanjo and the fragmented Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) first, and Nigerians second. The implication of this is that he is incapable of using the power given to him by all Nigerians, as the President and Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces, to stand against any internal or external aggression, but rather, would succumb to them (Lijadu, 2013). The issues are about the Nigerian state and as the President of Nigeria he should be addressing Nigerians officially at a World Press Conference. By his letter, the President presented Nigeria as the property of Obasanjo and the fragmented PDP and himself as an employee of the former President who is answering a query from the boss. Also, addressing Mr. Obasanjo as "Baba" is unfortunate to say the least. It is unbelievable and a monumental insult to Nigerians. I think the President is the 1st person in any civilized country! Is Mr. Obasanjo the "Baba" of President Jonathan? Would Barack Obama refer to former President Clinton as "Father" in a public letter of such significance (Lijadu, 2013)? In effect, the letters, their denials, the accusations carried by

the letters; and their denials, are all pointers to the gloomy pictures of the future reality in Nigeria, where the contradictions of democratic capitalism support the thesis of a nation tottering dangerously on the precipice.

The Concept of Sustainable National Development

Sustainable national development in the context of this study is intrinsically related to economic development. It is also important at this juncture to highlight that economic development in this study also highly relates with economic security, which in the final analysis should be human-centered. It is quite distinct from economic development as represented by growth-figures from the officialdom. Hence, by the problem of economic development may be meant the problem of accounting for the observed pattern, across countries and across time, in levels and rates of growth of per capita income (Lucas, Jr, 1988:3). In this study, per capita income still means a measure of the amount of money that is being earned per person in a certain area (<http://www.investopedia.com>). However, the twin concepts of poverty and inequality, which in their extreme cases translate to destitution, are more in tune with our methodology. Amaefule (2013:1) quotes the World Bank as announcing that over 100 million Nigerians live in destitution. The World Bank Country Director for Nigeria, Marie-Francoise Marie-Nelly, said this at the bank's Country Programme Portfolio Review in Enugu, Nigeria, on Tuesday, November 12, 2013. According to the World Bank boss, the number of Nigerians living in destitution makes up 8.33 per cent of the total number of people living in destitution all over the world. Marie-Nelly also said that although the World Bank was the largest overseas development agency that provided assistance to Nigeria, the contribution of the organization to the country was very small compared to the budgets of the states and the Federal Government. She said if the World Bank's small assistance could produce so much result because of effective implementation and monitoring, the revenues accruable to the country could do much more if they were similarly utilized (Amaefule, 2013:1). Incidentally, Nigeria's politico-economic class is not enamored by such distracting suggestions as effective implementation and monitoring of the revenues accruable to the country. They are more in love with letter writing, as tool of governance. Hence, the national concept of business is weird.

In its Doing Business 2014 Economy Profile, the World Bank (2013), ranked Nigeria at the 147th position, out of 189 countries. As a matter of fact, Nigeria dropped by -9 points from her 2013 position of 138 out of 185 countries. Thus, both in its literal and metaphoric interpretations, doing business in Nigeria has become traumatic and negates the positive assumptions that might have informed all the extant policy plans in the current democratic dispensations, from NEEDS to every other emotive

design. Thus, sustainable national development remains realizable only in the emotive imaginations of policy planners, while destitution increases. Indeed, it is not yet clear and acceptable to the politico-economic class in Nigeria that sustainable national development is more of a product of attitude than blue prints. Truly, sustainable national development is a function of the attitudes of a contented citizenry. It is not a function of some imported artefacts that malfunction perpetually, in the midst of poverty and inequality, leading to endless alibi of insufficient megawatts that lead to unending darkness, in place of electricity.

Nigeria's Dilemma in Democracy and Development

Truly, Nigeria needs development, which in the context of this study translates to economic development, which further translates to economic security, which is person-centered. Indeed, devoid of economic security, economic development becomes an abstraction. Nigeria's vociferous advisers however claim that she needs democracy. We underscore the fact that economics as a science instructs citizens and politicians that markets are better for them than politics and that *real* justice is *market* justice under which everybody is rewarded according to contribution rather than to needs redefined as rights... In the real world, however, it is not all that easy to talk people out of their "irrational" beliefs in social and political rights, as distinguished from the law of the market and the right of property (Streeck, 2011:3/4). Beliefs in social and political rights embolden citizens to demand the dividends of democracy, from their representatives in government. As a matter of fact, democracy is fundamentally about the social and political rights of citizens. Market justice is their antithesis. Market justice is the major impetus for the capitalist side of democratic capitalism. Incidentally, it also supplies fuel to profligacy in the management of state resources in a state like Nigeria. In the process, Nigeria is perceived to be running the costliest democracy in the world. Ejubekpokpo (2012) has abundantly demonstrated that excessive cost of governance in Nigeria hampers economic development. Onyisi and Eme (2013) have also sufficiently demonstrated with concrete instances, that under the Jonathan Presidency in Nigeria, cost of governance is rather outrageous. According to Enwegbara (2013), government after government in Nigeria, since the return to democracy in 1999, has talked about reducing the country's high cost of governance. The irony is that rather than reducing, every new government seems to be increasing it further than it inherited from its predecessor (Enwegbara, 2013). In fact, since Nigeria's return to the path of civilian government in 1999, the market justice theorists have taken the center stage. A particularly pronounced promoter of market justice theory in the political economy of Nigeria is the internationally reputable World Bank bureaucrat,

Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who is Minister of Finance and the Coordinating Minister for the Economy, in the Jonathan Administration. Recently, Okonjo-Iweala made the following admission, about the economy of Nigeria:

According to Thisdaylive (2013): The Coordinating Minister for the Economy and Minister of Finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has warned that the Nigerian economy may be in a precarious situation if the private sector does not join hands with government to create jobs and reduce inequality in the country. Okonjo-Iweala who made this known at a breakfast dialogue in Lagos, tagged: “The State of the Nigerian Economy in 2013,” organized by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), also warned that the politicization of Nigeria’s budgeting process would not help the country. The minister, who accused the private sector of creating wealth for a few and not jobs, disclosed that the federal government created a total of 1.6 million jobs in 2012 and another 431, 000 jobs in the first quarter of 2013. This, she added, showed an improved trend of job creation and increase of 11.69 per cent over the level in the fourth quarter of 2012. The minister, who hailed the government’s economic policies, stated that without microeconomic stability there could be no jobs, adding that the government would continue to pursue microeconomic stability so that companies could plan. According to her, the quality of growth in the economy needs to improve; we are not creating enough jobs, the Minister complains (Thisdaylive, 2013). We need to grow faster in job creating sectors at between 10 per cent per annum, to create jobs needed to substantially reduce poverty in the country. The inequality in the country is growing faster and the growth in the economy is not inclusive. If the private sector does not create jobs, the economy will be in danger. Only the top 10% of Nigerians are enjoying most of the growth in the economy unlike what is obtainable in the United States of America. We also very importantly need to take care of regional disparity and carry every region of the country along, Okonjo-Iweala concludes (Thisdaylive, 2013).

The issue of substantiating claims of creating a total of 1.6 million jobs in 2012 and another 431,000 jobs in the first quarter of 2013 in Nigeria by the market justice devotees, whose key player in Nigeria’s political economy is Okonjo-Iweala, can be suspended for now; after all, in listening to somebody’s dream experiences, the listener is obligated to the dream narrator, over matters of the benefit of the doubt, on the veracity of claims made by the dreamer. The truth remains however, that Okonjo-Iweala’s admission of the imminence of danger in the economy is evident of development in reverse gear in the political economy of Nigeria; in tandem with the inherent contradictions of capitalist democracy, as led by market justice. Invariably, Nigeria’s dilemma in democracy and development is the

dilemma of democratic capitalism. Essentially, if “we, the people”, jettison their market justice theory at this point, under the ambition of reinstituting democracy, the people will be accused of torpedoing the process of development. Alternatively, the long-suffering citizens will continue to bear the weight of the contradictions of capitalist democracy. Parenthetically, if the victims of market justice (“we, the people”) fail to act, they do grave injustice to democracy, as their social and political rights are trampled upon. This is the dilemma of democracy and development in Nigeria.

Emerging Issues in Democracy

The center of the emerging issues in democracy is the notion of the erosion of the credibility of democracy, as the final form of government. It is truly amazing that democracy, in all its promises, has not prevented for instance, the incidence of rising inequality. In this regard, in the United States, the flagship-economy of democracy, President Obama describes increasing inequality, as the defining issue of our time; highlighting that the decades-long trend was undermining economic growth and social cohesion in the US (McGregor and Munshi, 2013). As part of the emerging issues; according to Moller and Skaaning (2013:1), beginning in the mid-1970s, and especially during the decade after the 1989-91 breakdown of communist regimes, the world saw a remarkable rise in the number of democracies. Recently, however, the trend has slowed. Thus, at the end of their deeply graphical presentation of historical trends in global democratic waves, Moller and Skaaning (2013:16) conclude that much of the evidence indicates that we have now entered a period of aggregate standstill in democratic tides. This suggests the hope for a new wave of democracy, at the end of the era of aggregate standstill. Kurlantzick (2013:1) however disagrees, and believes that democracy is in a profound state of crisis.

After managing to spice up his work with some positive democracy Zeitgeist, Kurlantzick, (2013:5) concludes as follows: Yet, even in developing nations where democracy has deeper roots, disillusionment with politics and democratically elected leaders has exploded in recent years. Disillusionment here is often attributed to politicians’ inability to respond to global and national economic crises with nothing but biting austerity measures. In extreme cases, disillusioned citizens have joined anti-democratic militant mass movements such as Greece’s Golden Dawn, Myanmar’s 969 Movement, or Thailand’s PAD. These groups have often sparked inter-communal riots and encouraged violent acts against minorities. They have also tried to sabotage the political process by pushing for a coup or other anti-democratic transfer of power. Yes, democracy is ruling in a bad state these days (Kurlantzick, 2013:5).

In effect, the emerging issues in democracy point towards the direction that the democracy credentials are no longer unassailable. The eerie issue however, is that the menacing alternative is authoritarianism. In the context of this paper, it is the contradictory authoritarianism of the market justice theorists that is in focus.

Reimagining The Nexus

The orthodox Nigerian imagination of the nexus between democracy and sustainable national development, intriguingly borders on what Achebe (1983:10) describes as a tendency among the Nigerian ruling elite to live in a world of make-believe and unrealistic expectations. According to Achebe, this is the cargo cult mentality that anthropologists sometimes speak about - a belief by backward people that someday without any exertion whatsoever on their own part, a fairy ship will dock in their harbor, laden with every goody they have always dreamed of possessing. In the Nigerian state, the capacity of democracy to lead to sustainable national development has become bedeviled by the cargo cult orthodoxy. Thus, in the face of other competing national needs, democracy - translatable to conduct of national elections - has to receive top financial priority because, once democracy is in place, that is; once elections have been ostensibly conducted and winners and losers emerge or are submerged, sustainable national development will invariably occur. In this regard, according to Aborisade (2013:1) Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission says it may spend at least \$7.9 on each of the 73.5 million electorates in its register for the 2015 elections. The amount was estimated at N93bn when converted to naira and multiplied by the number of registered voters (Aborisade, 2013:1). This is in a country where recent World Bank estimates indicate that 100 million of its estimated 170 million people are living in abject poverty (Amaefule, 2013:1).

Hence, democracy in our reimagination, must lead to the creation of new Nigerians. In other words, democracy must lead to the creation of new human capital in Nigeria. That is why, according to Muoghalu (2013:2), Nigeria's economic development plan is anchored on the Nigerian Vision 20:2020, as one of the strategies for achieving the vision is by investing to transform the Nigerian people into catalysts for growth and national renewal, and a lasting source of competitive advantage. Muoghalu (2013:6) argues that it is doubly important for Nigeria to begin to make massive investments in education and human capital. Otherwise, its lofty vision to be one of the top 20 economies in the world by the year 2020 may not be realized. Incidentally, this opinion is as good as admitting that the Vision 20:2020 is endangered. We highlight that it is already seven years to the year 2020 and the making of the required massive investments are yet to begin in earnest. In effect, the centrality of human capital, in the development matrix, is further

underscored by Mkandawire and Soludo (1998:112), who opine that if one has to make errors with regard to the accumulation of human capital, it is better to make them on the side of excess. In other words, no errors should be contemplated. However, under Nigeria's democratic capitalism, university admission is denied to some otherwise qualified citizens, so there won't be excess of human capital. Indeed, Nigeria's educational system is full of undemocratic contradictions and seemingly innocuous social paradoxes. These seemingly innocuous flaws in the system are however immensely detrimental to sustainable national developmental ambition. Let us demonstrate this: In and around all the publicly owned universities and other higher educational institutions in Nigeria, are found large armies of highly skilled (and some unskilled) young men and women (mostly young women), engaged in the type-setting of the academic papers and projects of most of the undergraduate and graduate students, up to Ph.D scale. These youth are also engaged in the type-setting of the professional presentations and sundry publications of the academics in these communities. These same youth armies are incongruously adjudged by a malfunctioning but ostensibly democratic system as not competent enough to obtain university admission. On yearly basis, they sit for University Matriculation Examination as ritual; and are told they failed in the examinations. Yet they constitute an integral part of the academic output of these same institutions. They type-set and package (sometimes the apprentices among them damage) Ph.D proposals for doctoral candidates but may never gain admission into any of the courses in these same institutions. As a matter of fact, a democratic system that produces and / or condones the above contradictions is callous and to postulate that this army of rejected admission candidates is unqualified for university admission is curious because, the national academic community which they serve; unofficially treats them as qualified candidates, by relying on them to produce its papers and sundry publications. According to Clark and Ausukuya (2013:1), this year (2013), 1.7 million students registered for Nigeria's centralized tertiary admissions examinations, all competing for the half a million places available; potentially leaving over a million qualified college-age Nigerians without a postsecondary place. This despite the fact that the number of available places has grown significantly in recent years, as the government establishes new institutions, in its efforts to meet demand. Since 2005, the number of universities alone has grown from 51 to 128, while capacity at existing universities has been stretched to its limits (Clark and Ausukuya, 2013:1).

The truth remains in this regard that, except there is a national wish, with the politico-economic class as the bona fide exponents, to take the Nigerian State back to the Stone Age, this state of affairs must be irritating to Nigeria's Letter Writers. In essence, this state of affairs relates rather

negatively with any declared intentions to achieve sustainable national development in Nigeria. Fundamentally, democracy in Nigeria must lead to the democratization of opportunities for higher education by every gifted citizen, irrespective of the teeming number; a supposition in support of erring on the side of excess. It is a challenge of democracy and an imperative for sustainable national development. It is an issue that is at the heart of the thesis for the creation of new Nigerians and the development of a stock of new human capital in Nigeria. From this stock of new human capital, shall arise new democrats and truly patriotic political economists who personally operate from strong positions of economic security as against positions of flight from imminent destitution.

Secondly, deliberative democracy is the way to go in Nigeria. The core of the brand of democracy that would link democracy with development in Nigeria has to be essentially deliberative. This is because, the counterpoise of representative democracy, as currently held to be the ultimate in democratic standards, shortchanges Nigerian citizens. The representative democratic standard-bearers are *ab initio*, disconnected from the citizens. In many cases, they are products of the metropolitan states, residents of metropolitan states, with metropolitan tastes; metropolitan education and metropolitan worldviews, whose recipes for Nigeria's sustainable national development are created in metropolitan home economics classrooms. Let us illustrate: When the metropolitan spin doctors talk about massive creation of cottage industries, the citizens do not understand them because the cottage industries are already everywhere, created by the citizens. The massive amounts they claim to have voted for the establishment of such industries end up in their pockets and in the pockets of their local accomplices because the citizens have already established the industries and they are running them. Hence, Ober (2013:104) has contended as follows: if a democracy is to be robustly sustained over time, public decisions must respect democratic values, while advancing citizens' interests. Democracy is a sham if meaningful decisions, leading to significant public outcomes, are not made by free citizens, secure in their dignity, acting as political equals (Ober 2013:104). Raaflaub and Wallace (2007:22) argue that democracy is constituted through institutions, practices, mentalities and eventually, ideologies. Farrar (2007:172) posits that revolutionary democratizing change can occur only once the citizenry as a whole becomes aware of its own potential power and collective identity.

Deliberative democracy entails that what the Assemblyman says on the floor of Parliament is what we have agreed with him that he should say on our behalf. It is not what he thinks that will be good for us if he says so. Moreover, it is not what he claims that we have asked him to say. Furthermore, pursuant to the tenets of deliberative democracy, the Nigerian

National Assembly should be a part-time parliament (Okeke, 2010:24). Under the current arrangement, as soon as the legislator is elected, he moves to the Federal Capital Territory, and almost in a permanent manner takes up residence at the Federal Capital Territory. In no distant time, he is joined by his immediate and extended family members. Gradually too, he is joined by his immediate praise-singers. Then his disconnection with his constituency is made complete. He now starts to represent himself. With political power in his pocket, he now focuses on economic power / the acquisition of economic power. Where he hitherto had economic power, he now aims at consolidation and the grabbing of more economic power, through dubious acquisition of real estates in the lucrative landed property deals at the Federal Capital Territory. Finally, he adds the prefix “self” to representation. He is now a confirmed capital owner, worthy of recognition or accommodation, in the international financial industry.

More than ever, concludes Streeck (2011:22), economic power seems today to have become political power, while citizens appear to be almost entirely stripped of their democratic defenses and their capacity to impress on the political economy interests and demands incommensurable with those of capital owners. In fact, looking back at the democratic-capitalist crisis sequence since the 1970s, one cannot but be afraid of the possibility of a new, however temporary, settlement of social conflict in advanced capitalism, this time entirely in favor of the propertied classes now firmly entrenched in their politically unconquerable institutional stronghold, the international financial industry (Streeck, 2011:22).

The above conclusion, in all its eerie implications is applicable to Nigeria, even in it's “however temporary” connotations. The wider possibilities are in any case, slightly different in Nigeria. This is fundamentally and entirely because, Nigeria's economic-political power is only sustained by petro-naira abuses. It is not the product of any basic macro-economic maneuvers. Thus, the Nigerian propertied class, either directly or in indirect manner, is propertied by petro-naira political and economic abuses. Hence, if for instance, the shale oil possibilities become reality [see The Nigerian Economic Summit Group ‘NESG’ Policy Paper, July 2013; Aimurie and Agba (2013)] or if any other development that might fundamentally shake the foundations of the petro-naira sources of individual economic-political power in Nigeria occurs, then the day of reckoning would have come for the propertied class. The propertied class would meet face to face with the reality of an underdeveloped human capital base of the Nigerian political economy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we reiterate that democracy is at the crossroads in Nigeria and that development also has only materialized in the unbecoming imaginations of Nigeria's ostensibly eminent development planners; mostly advocates of the market justice worldview. Our findings indeed, highly support the thesis that there is politics without progress in Nigeria. Furthermore, our findings justify the viewpoint that critically, there is democracy without development in Nigeria. Our concept of development is entirely man-centered as contrary to the highfalutin performance indicators from officialdom. In conclusion, we have postulated in our reimaginings, that what needs to be done in locating the nexus of democracy and sustainable national development in Nigeria is truly not complicated. Democracy we imagined, must lead to the creation of new Nigerians / a stock of new human capital and that the core of the brand of democracy that would link democracy with development in Nigeria, has to be essentially deliberative. In essence, in our reimaginings, we inferred that the location of the elusive nexus between democracy and sustainable national development in Nigeria involves far more than an understanding of theory, since it will only succeed when real people with limited knowledge and conflicting interests can be persuaded to put aside some part of their own private needs in order to contribute to a collective and cooperative enterprise (Brett 2000:20) officially known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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